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Docket No. 06727/000H449-

USO

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of: Amir Herzberg; Yochai Yehiel; Shai Eldad; and Boaz Binnun

Serial No.: 09/625,006

Confirmation No.: 7174

Filed: July 25, 2000

Group Art Unit: 3621

For: MICRO PAYMENT-BASED ADVERTISING

APPEAL BRIEF

Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
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GROUP 3600

(1) Real Party in Interest

The subject application is owned by International Business Machines Corporation, having a place of business at New Orchard Road, Armonk, New York. The assignment was recorded in the U.S.P.T.O. on July 25, 2000, under Reel 010973, Frames 0645-0647.

(2) Related Appeals and Interferences

None.

(3) Status of Claims

This application as filed included claims 1-35. In an amendment filed April 28, 2003, in response to a second Official Action dated March 26, 2003, Appellant amended claims 1, 9, 15, 24, 27, 30 and 33 and canceled claims 7, 8, 10, 21 and 22.

response to an Advisory Action dated May 16, 2003, Appellant filed an additional amendment to claims 1, 4, 15, 24, 27, 30 and 33. All the claims were subsequently rejected in an Official Action dated September 9, 2003.

On December 9, 2003, Appellant appealed from the rejection of claims 1-6, 9, 11-20 and 23-35 (all the claims currently pending in this application).

(4) Status of Amendments

Together with filing of this Appeal Brief, the Appellant has filed an amendment to correct a defect of antecedence in claim 15, in order to put the claim in better form for appeal.

(5) Summary of the Invention

Appellant's invention, as recited in independent claims 1, 24 and 30 (as amended), provides a method, apparatus and computer software product for electronic advertising. The invention is directed specifically to compensating advertisers for their sales of items, such as electronic content, that they offer on behalf of a merchant on a "page per fee" basis.

The method recited in claim 1 comprises the following steps (underlining added for emphasis):

(a) Providing multiple, different aliases to represent the network address of a page-per-fee item offered by the merchant, all of the aliases representing the same network address.

(b) Assigning the aliases respectively to multiple advertisers for their use in advertising the item and in receiving payment for the sale of the item. Each respective alias is assigned by the merchant to specifically identify one of the advertisers.

(c) Posting an advertisement (on the advertiser's Web site, for example – page 5, lines 11-12 in the present patent application) offering the item to a buyer for purchase via a network link. The link is represented in the advertisement by the alias, which conceals the actual network address of the item from the buyer.

(d) Receiving an invocation of the link from the buyer (typically by clicking on the advertisement – page 6, lines 6-8).

(e) Transmitting an order to the merchant in response to the invocation, the order comprising a message that includes the respective alias.

(f) Conveying the item from the merchant to the buyer in response to the order.

(g) Receiving in consideration for the advertisement (typically in the advertiser's account – page 6, lines 14-15) a predefined portion of the price paid by the buyer responsively to the respective alias.

The steps of the method of claim 1 are shown in Figs. 2 and 3 of the present patent application and are described with reference thereto in the specification. Steps (a) and (b), providing and assigning aliases, are described on page 14, lines 8-18. "The merchant defines an alias for each content page..." (page 14, lines 8-9). "Preferably the aliases are specific to each advertiser" (page 14, lines 13-14), so that "the merchant and/or the billing server... can determine the identity of the advertiser from the alias used" (page 4, lines 28-30). In other words, the present patent application clearly envisions a situation in which multiple advertisers are involved, with a specific, respective alias assigned to each advertiser. (See also page 8, lines 10-12: "...the alias is assigned by the merchant to correspond specifically to the advertiser, among a plurality of advertisers who post the advertisement.")

Step (c) corresponds to step 46 in Fig. 2 (page 14, lines 27-30), while step (d) corresponds to step 52 in Fig. 3 (page 15, lines 26-29). Step (e), transmitting the order, is described in the specification on page 16, lines 4-6. Inclusion of the advertiser's alias in the order message is described in the specification on page 8, lines 6-9 (as recited in original claims 8 and 22, now canceled). Steps (f) and (g) correspond respectively to steps 60 and 64 in Fig. 3, as described on page 17 in the specification.

Claim 24 recites a merchant processor and an advertising processor that carry out the steps of claim 1, while claim 30 recites software that causes first and second computers to perform these functions. The processors and software are described in the specification on page 13, lines 21-28. The merchant processor (24) and advertising processor (32) are shown in Fig. 1.

Independent claims 15, 27 and 33 define a method, apparatus and computer software product according to another aspect of the present invention. The method recited in claim 15 is carried out by a merchant, and comprises the following steps:

(a) Offering an item for purchase by a buyer on a page-per-fee basis via a network link.

(b) Providing multiple different aliases to represent the network address of the item.

(c) Assigning a respective alias to each of a plurality of different advertisers from among the multiple aliases. Each alias is assigned to specifically identify one of the advertisers, for use by the advertiser in receiving payment for a sale of the item.

(d) Defining terms for advertising, in accordance with which each of the advertisers posts an advertisement containing the advertiser's alias. The alias serves as a reference to the network link to the item, while concealing the network link from the buyer.

(e) Receiving (at the merchant's computer) an order from one of the advertisers for supply of the item to the buyer. The order is sent in response to invocation by the buyer of the link in the advertisement. The order comprises a message that includes the respective alias of the advertiser.

(f) Conveying the item via the advertiser to the buyer, in response to the order.

(g) Receiving payment from the buyer. A predefined portion of the price is paid to the advertiser, responsively to the respective alias, in accordance with the terms of advertising.

Step (a) – offering an item on a page-for-fee basis, is a basic premise of the present invention, as noted on page 5, lines 16-19, of the present patent application, for example. Steps (b) and (c) are similar in substance to steps (a) and (b) of claim 1, and are supported in the specification on page 14, lines 8-18, as explained above. Step (d) corresponds to step 50 in Fig. 2, as described on page 14, lines 1-6. Step (e) is similar in substance to steps (d) and (e) of claim 1, and is described in the specification on page 15, lines 26-29, page 16, lines 4-6, and page 8, lines 6-9. Step (f) in claim 15 is similar to step (f) in claim 1, but adds the limitation that the page-per-fee item is conveyed to the buyer via the advertiser, as described on page 17, lines 14-17. Step (g) in claim 15, like step (g) in claim 1, corresponds to step 64 in Fig. 3.

Claim 27 recites a merchant processor that carries out the steps of claim 15 (in interaction with advertisers), while claim 33 recites software that causes a computer to perform these functions. As noted above, the merchant processor is shown in Fig. 1, and both the processor and software are described in the specification on page 13, lines 21-28.

The remaining claims each depend from one of the above-mentioned independent claims. Appellant notes in particular claim 11, which depends from claim 1, and adds the limitation that transmission of the order (to the merchant) comprises sending a communication from the advertiser to the merchant, including a code identifying the

advertiser. This claim corresponds to step 56 in Fig. 3, as described in the specification on page 16, lines 12-14, and page 15, line 9.

(6) Issues

All the claims currently pending in this application were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Messer (U.S. 5,991,740) in view of Barber (U.S. 6,157,917). Appellant believes this rejection should be reversed

(7) Grouping of Claims

Claims 1-6, 9, 12-14, 24-26 and 30-32 stand or fall together.

Claims 15-20, 23, 27-29 and 33-35 stand or fall together.

Claim 11 stands or falls by itself.

(8) Argument

I. The Section 103(a) Rejection of Claims 1-6, 9, 12-14, 24-26 and 30-32

Appellant respectfully submits that the Examiner erred in maintaining that it would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art to combine the teachings of Messer and Barber so as to arrive at the inventive method, apparatus and software product recited by claims 1, 24 and 30.

Messer describes a data processing system for managing transaction-related information generated on a network, including referral fee accounting for purchases. These functions are performed by a Clearinghouse Server, which communicates with Merchants and with Site Owners, who advertise the Merchants' products on their Web sites (see Figs. 1 and 2, and col. 5, lines 4-16). When a user accesses a banner ad on a Web site operated by a Site Owner, the user is referred to the Clearinghouse server. This server stores site and user information, and then directs the user to the Merchant's Web page. If the user then makes a purchase from the Merchant, information is transferred back to the Clearinghouse Server, which then calculates the appropriate commission payment (col. 8, line 57 – col. 9, line 11). Messer makes no mention or suggestion of the use of aliases in this context.

Barber describes a method for charging for pay-per-access information on a network. In his patent, Barber proposes to use an "acquirer" to reduce the network bandwidth required in

transferring small payments between a payer, a payee and an issuer (col. 1, lines 54-61). In the embodiments described by Barber, the payee is a Web site operator, who offers information for sale; the payer is a computer user who purchases the information from the Web site operator; and the issuer is a service that manages a payer database (col. 1, lines 44-53). The acquirer stores and retrieves information about the payer's account with the issuer, in the form of a dynamic data object, like a cookie, on the payer's computer (col. 1, lines 62-65).

In other words, Barber's acquirer serves as a facility for clearing electronic payments in pay-per-link purchases. When a payer wants to make a purchase, he clicks on a link at the Web site of the payee. The payee automatically redirects the payer to the acquirer, who charges the cost of the page against the account held in the payer's cookie. The acquirer then redirects the payer to the payee's Web site to receive the requested information (col. 2, lines 28-42, and Fig. 1). Barber describes a use of aliases by the acquirer in order to determine the page on the payee's site to which the payer should be redirected after the acquirer has charged the payer for the appropriate cost (col. 7, lines 32-40). Barber shows a list of typical aliases in Table 2.

In rejecting claims 1, 24 and 30, the Examiner concedes (in paragraph 9 of the September 9 Official Action) that Messer does not disclose the use of aliases, but notes that Barber does use aliases to hide a URL from a user. The Examiner goes on to state:

"In table 2 of Barber it is clear that steps are taken to create an alias for the item that is being advertised on the advertiser's site. This alias is unique to that particular advertiser and directs the end user to the same location as any other advertiser would be directed to access the same item of purchase or view (plurality of aliases as different advertiser sites are involved and the aliases would represent the same address for the same item). It is clear that multiple advertisers are intended to use the system (See Barber column 7, ln. 59-68). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art at the time the current invention was made to combine the above teachings to achieve a more reliable and efficient processing system and method for preventing a user to circumvent the click through that is required for the advertising web site to be compensated. In addition it would be inherent to have the multiple aliases, because one would not be able to use the same alias for the other advertising sites other than the same advertising site."

Appellant respectfully submits that there are a number of logical and legal flaws in the Examiner's argument, and that in consequence the Examiner has failed to make a *prima facie* case of obviousness:

A. Barber neither teaches nor suggests the use of aliases in the context of advertising.

Barber uses aliases in the operation of an acquirer, whose role is to process accounting information and collect payments (see Barber's abstract and the explanation above). Barber makes no mention or suggestion that advertising might be a part of the acquirer's function, and the Examiner is simply incorrect in identifying the acquirer as an advertiser. As shown by Barber in Figs. 1 and 2, the payer (computer user) requests pay-per-link information exclusively from the payee (site owner), and receives the target information from the payee, without involvement of an advertiser.

B. Barber neither teaches nor suggests the use of a plurality of different aliases to represent the same network address, as required by claim 1. Barber's Table 2 shows multiple aliases, but only a single alias is assigned to each URL (target address). The accompanying description makes no mention whatsoever of adding further aliases to represent the same URLs, or for adding different aliases for any purpose.

C. Even if Barber's acquirer were conceded to be analogous to an advertiser, the prior art still does not teach or suggest the use of multiple, different aliases for different acquirers.

Barber describes a system in which there may be multiple acquirers, but he teaches away from having links from a given payee Web site to multiple acquirers: "The payee can have accounts with other acquirers too, but need only direct links to one of the acquirers... called here the primary acquirer" (col. 4, lines 8-11). Barber's Fig. 2 shows a multiple-acquirer scenario, but even here only a single acquirer (15b) is linked to the payee. Furthermore, even if a payee were somehow to maintain links to multiple acquirers, there is no teaching or suggestion in the prior art to indicate that multiple aliases for a single target address might be necessary or advantageous in this context. The payee needs to know only that the payer has been charged for his purchase, and does not care which acquirer cleared the payment.

D. Even if Barber were taken to suggest the use of multiple aliases for a single network address, there is no suggestion in the prior art that would have led a person of ordinary skill in the art to apply this system of aliases to the problem of commission payments to advertisers. The alias-based method of the present invention is only one possible (although advantageous) method for tracking payments to be made to advertisers. Messer describes

a different method, based on the use of a central Clearinghouse, as detailed above. There is no need or justification for the use of aliases in the context of Messer's method. Barber does not describe any system for paying commissions to advertisers.

E. Even if the prior art were taken to suggest the use of aliases in a multi-advertiser system, there is no inherent requirement that different advertisers use different, respective aliases.

The Examiner argues that "it would be inherent to have multiple aliases, because one would not be able to use the same alias for the other advertising sites..." There is no foundation for this statement in the prior art, nor is there even a foundation to make such a statement based on the present patent application. On the contrary, it is possible for all advertisers to use the same alias. Other means may be used to identify the advertiser in each case, such as an advertiser identification code and password (see page 14, lines 22-27, in the specification).

In conclusion, it is clear that the only actual suggestion to use multiple, different aliases for multiple advertisers, as recited in claims 1, 24 and 30, comes from the present patent application. The Examiner has fallen into the "hindsight trap," against which the courts have repeatedly warned. See, for example, *In re Dembiczak*, 175 F.3d 1040, 50 USPQ2d 1614 (Fed. Cir. 1990):

"Our case law makes clear that the best defense against the subtle but powerful attraction of a hindsight-based obviousness analysis is rigorous application of the requirement for a showing of the teaching or motivation to combine prior art references... Combining prior art references without evidence of such a suggestion, teaching, or motivation simply takes the inventor's disclosure as a blueprint for piecing together the prior art to defeat patentability--the essence of hindsight... ('The invention must be viewed not with the blueprint drawn by the inventor, but in the state of the art that existed at the time.') In this case, the Board fell into the hindsight trap."

In light of the foregoing explanations, it is Appellant's position that, contrary to the Examiner's finding, there is nothing in the cited art to negate the patentability of claims 1, 24 and 30. For this reason, *inter alia*, claims 2-6, 9 and 11-14, which depend directly or indirectly from claim 1, claims 25 and 26, which depend from claim 24, and claims 31 and 32, which depend from claim 30, are likewise believed to be patentable over the cited art.

II. The Section 103(a) Rejection of Claims 15-20, 23, 27-29 and 33-35

Appellant respectfully submits that the Examiner is in error in maintaining that it would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art to combine the teachings of Messer and Barber so as to arrive at the inventive method, apparatus and software product recited by claims 15, 27 and 33.

The Examiner rejected claims 15, 27 and 33 on grounds that were essentially identical to the grounds of rejection of claims 1, 24 and 30. In particular, paragraph 11 in the Examiner's remarks, relating to the recitation of multiple aliases for multiple advertisers, is copied *verbatim* from paragraph 9, as quoted above. Appellant believes the Examiner's position in this regard to be clearly incorrect, as argued at length with reference to claims 1, 24 and 30. For brevity, the above arguments will not be repeated here, other than to reiterate that the cited art neither teaches nor suggests the steps (as recited in claim 15) of providing a plurality of different aliases to represent the same network address of an item offered for sale, and assigning a respective alias to each of a plurality of different advertisers.

Furthermore, claims 15, 27 and 33 recite that after receiving an order from an advertiser for supply of an item, the merchant conveys the item via the advertiser to the buyer. This model of providing page-per-fee content via the advertiser, rather than directly from the merchant to the buyer, is facilitated by the novel use of aliases taught by the present patent application. It differs from the accepted paradigm of conveying purchased items directly from the merchant to the buyer. The Examiner states that this step is disclosed by Messer (abstract, Figs. 1, 2, 6A and 6B, col. 5, lines 4-33 and col. 3, lines 1-68) and by Barber (abstract, col. 1, lines 43-68, and col. 2, lines 1-42, col. 5, lines 1-43, col. 7, lines 23-68, and col. 8, lines 1-27).

Appellant has studied all the passages cited by the Examiner, and respectfully submits that neither Messer nor Barber teaches or suggests conveying a page-per-fee item via an advertiser. Although Messer describes methods for compensating an advertiser ("Site Owner") for posting an advertisement, he shows the supply of purchased items flowing only from the merchant to the user (Figs. 1 and 2). Barber mentions in passing that the payer's browser may retrieve a page from an acquirer (col. 2, lines 5-6). As noted above, however, the acquirer is responsible for clearing payments and is not an advertiser. Thus, the cited

art fails to teach or suggest the step of conveying the item, responsive to the order, via the advertiser to the buyer, as recited in claims 15, 27 and 33.

To summarize, based on the detailed arguments presented above, Appellant respectfully submits that independent claims 15, 27 and 33 are patentable over the cited art, as are claims 16-20, 23, 28, 29, 34 and 35, which depend from these independent claims.

III. The Section 103(a) Rejection of Claim 11

Appellant respectfully submits that even if independent claim 1 were conceded to be unpatentable over Messer in view of Barber, it would still not be obvious to combine the teachings of these references to arrive at the additional limitation recited by dependent claim 11. This claim states that the order for supply of the item to the buyer is transmitted to the merchant in the form of a communication from the advertiser, including an identifying code issued to the advertiser by the merchant.

In rejecting this claim, the Examiner asserts that the added limitation that it recites is clearly taught by both Messer and Barber (Messer col. 4, lines 47-60, and Barber col. 4, lines 3-48, col. 7, lines 23-68, and col. 8, lines 1-27). The cited passage in Messer actually contradicts the Examiner's assertion, by stating: "USERS that access the banner [ad posted by the Site Owner] are transferred to the Merchant's web page... and may be presented with the ability to make a purchase directly from the Merchant" (emphasis added). Messer goes on to state that his invention modifies this process by allowing a portion of the successful sale to be credited to the Site Owner. It is clear, however, that the order is submitted directly to the Merchant by the user, and not by the Site Owner.

Barber, as noted above, does not describe any sort of involvement by advertisers in the purchasing process, and thus cannot be taken to teach or suggest any sort of action that might be taken by an advertiser. In any case, even if it were conceded that Barber's acquirer is somehow analogous to an advertiser, the only transmission that is made in Barber's system from the acquirer to the payee (as shown in Figs. 1 and 2) is the "payee settlement order" (10), which occurs after the payer's order for supply of the item has already been fulfilled (6). The order for supply of the item is clearly submitted by the payer to the payee directly, not via the acquirer.

Thus, Appellant respectfully submits that claim 11 is independently patentable over the cited art.

Summary

For the foregoing reasons, it is submitted that the Examiner's rejection of claims 1-6, 9, 11-20 and 23-35 was erroneous. Reversal of his decision is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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APPENDIX A

Claims pending as of the present date (as amended on August 5, 2003, in Appellant's response to the Advisory Action dated May 16, 2003, and further amended at the time of submission of this Appeal Brief).

1. A method for electronic advertising, comprising:

providing a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of an item offered by a merchant for sale on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address;

assigning respective aliases from among the plurality of different aliases to a plurality of advertisers for use by the advertisers in advertising the item and in receiving payment for the sale of the item, such that each respective alias from among the plurality of aliases is assigned by the merchant to specifically identify a respective one of the plurality of advertisers;

posting an advertisement offering the item to a buyer for purchase via a network link represented in the advertisement by the respective alias, which conceals the network address from the buyer;

receiving an invocation of the link from the buyer;

responsive to the invocation, transmitting an order to the merchant for supply of the item to the buyer in exchange for payment of the price by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias;

conveying the item, responsive to the order, from the merchant to the buyer; and

receiving, responsively to the respective alias, a predefined portion of the price paid by the buyer in consideration for posting the advertisement.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein posting the advertisement comprises displaying the advertisement on a Web site maintained by the advertiser and accessible to the buyer via the Internet, and wherein receiving the invocation comprises receiving an indication that the buyer has selected the link.

3. A method according to claim 2, wherein transmitting the order comprises transmitting the order in exchange for a micro payment made from the buyer to the merchant.

4. A method according to claim 3, wherein responsive to the micro payment and to the respective alias, a billing server transfers a credit to the merchant, and wherein receiving the predefined portion of the price comprises receiving from the billing server a portion of the micro payment.

5. A method according to claim 3, wherein receiving the predefined portion of the price comprises receiving from the merchant a portion of the micro payment.

6. A method according to claim 2, wherein conveying the item comprises allowing the buyer to access one or more Web pages of the merchant.

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein transmitting the order comprises passing the alias in a coded form.

11. A method according to claim 1, wherein transmitting the order comprises sending a communication from the advertiser to the merchant including an identifying code issued to the advertiser by the merchant.

12. A method according to claim 1, wherein transmitting the order comprises making a record of the order for use in verifying that the predefined portion of the price is paid to the advertiser by the merchant.

13. A method according to claim 1, wherein posting the advertisement comprises posting the advertisement in accordance with advertising terms published by the merchant, and wherein receiving the predefined portion of the price comprises receiving the portion as specified by the advertising terms.

14. A method according to claim 13, wherein transmitting the order comprises submitting, along with the order, a coded reference to the advertising terms.

15. A method for electronic commerce by a merchant, comprising:
offering an item for purchase by a buyer on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price via a network link;

providing a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of the item, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address;

assigning a respective alias to each of a plurality of different advertisers, from among the plurality of different aliases, such that each of the plurality of aliases is assigned to

specifically identify a respective advertiser among the plurality of advertisers for use by the advertiser in receiving payment for a sale of the item;
defining terms for advertising, in accordance with which each of the advertisers posts an advertisement for the item, the advertisement containing the alias, which serves as a reference to the network link while concealing the network link from the buyer;
receiving from an advertiser among the plurality of different advertisers an order for supply of the item to the buyer responsive to invocation of the link in the advertisement by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias;
conveying the item, responsive to the order, via the advertiser to the buyer; and
receiving payment from the buyer for the item, while a predefined portion of the price is paid to the advertiser, responsively to the respective alias, in consideration for posting the advertisement, in accordance with the terms of advertising.

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein offering the item for purchase comprises offering the item on a Web page of a Web site maintained by the merchant and accessible via the Internet, and wherein conveying the order comprises granting the buyer access to the Web page.

17. A method according to claim 16, wherein receiving the payment comprises receiving a micro payment from the buyer.

18. A method according to claim 17, wherein responsive to the micro payment and to the respective alias, a billing server transfers a credit to the merchant and further transfers the predefined portion of the price to the advertiser.

19. A method according to claim 17, and comprising transferring a portion of the received micro payment from the merchant to the advertiser.

20. A method according to claim 16, wherein defining the terms for advertising comprises defining terms according to which the advertisement is displayed on a Web site of the advertiser.

23. A method according to claim 15, wherein defining the terms for advertising comprises issuing an identifying code to the advertiser, and wherein receiving the order comprises receiving a message including the code.

24. Apparatus for electronic advertising, comprising:

a merchant processor, which is adapted to provide a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of an item offered by a merchant for sale on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address, and to assign respective aliases from among the plurality of different aliases to a plurality of advertisers for use by the advertisers in advertising the item and in receiving payment for the sale of the item, such that each respective alias from among the plurality of aliases is assigned by the merchant to specifically identify a respective one of the plurality of advertisers; and

an advertising processor, which is adapted to receive the respective alias assigned by the merchant to an advertiser among the plurality of advertisers, and to post an advertisement offering the item to a buyer for purchase via a network link to the network address represented in the advertisement by the respective alias, which conceals the network address from the buyer, and responsive to receiving an invocation of the link by the buyer, to transmit an order to the merchant for supply of the item to the buyer in exchange for payment of the price by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias, to convey the item, responsive to the order, from the merchant to the buyer, and to receive a predefined portion of the price paid by the buyer, responsively to the alias, in consideration for posting the advertisement.

25. Apparatus according to claim 24, wherein the advertisement is displayed on a Web site maintained by the advertiser and accessible to the buyer via the Internet, and wherein the processor is adapted to receive the invocation of the link in the form of an indication that the buyer has selected the link.

26. Apparatus according to claim 25, wherein the payment comprises a micro payment transferred by the buyer.

27. Apparatus for electronic commerce for use by a merchant, comprising a merchant processor, which is adapted to offer an item for purchase by a buyer on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price via a network link, to provide a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of the item, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address, and to assign a respective alias to each of a plurality of different advertisers, from among the plurality of different aliases, such that each of the plurality of aliases is assigned to specifically identify a respective advertiser among the plurality of advertisers for use by the advertiser in receiving payment for a sale of the item, with defined

terms for advertising the item in accordance with which each of the advertisers posts an advertisement for the item, the advertisement containing the alias, which serves as a reference to the network link while concealing the network link from the buyer,

the processor being further adapted to convey the item via an advertiser among the plurality of different advertisers to the buyer in response to an order received from the advertiser for supply of the item to the buyer responsive to invocation of the link in the advertisement by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias of the advertiser, and to receive payment from the buyer for the item, while a predefined portion of the price is paid to the advertiser, responsively to the respective alias, in consideration for posting the advertisement, in accordance with the terms of advertising.

28. Apparatus according to claim 27, wherein the item is offered on a Web page of a Web site maintained by the merchant and accessible via the Internet, and wherein the processor conveys the item to the buyer by granting the buyer access to the Web page.

29. Apparatus according to claim 28, wherein the payment comprises a micro payment transferred by the buyer.

30. A computer software product for electronic advertising, the product comprising a computer-readable medium in which program instructions are stored, which instructions, when read by first and second computers, cause the first computer to provide a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of an item offered by a merchant for sale on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address, and to assign respective aliases from among the plurality of different aliases to a plurality of advertisers for use by the advertisers in advertising the item and in receiving payment for the sale of the item, such that each respective alias from among the plurality of aliases is assigned by the merchant to specifically identify a respective one of the plurality of advertisers, and

wherein the instructions cause the second computer to receive the respective alias assigned by the merchant to an advertiser among the plurality of advertisers, and to post an advertisement offering the item to a buyer for purchase via a network link to the network address represented in the advertisement by the respective alias, which conceals the network address from the buyer, and responsive to receiving an invocation of the link from the buyer, to transmit an order to the merchant for supply of the item to

the buyer in exchange for payment of the price by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias, to convey the item, responsive to the order, from the merchant to the buyer, and to receive a predefined portion of the price paid by the buyer, responsively to the alias, in consideration for posting the advertisement.

31. A product according to claim 30, wherein the advertisement is displayed on a Web site maintained by the advertiser and accessible to the buyer via the Internet, and wherein the instructions cause the computer to receive the invocation of the link in the form of an indication that the buyer has selected the link.

32. A product according to claim 31, wherein the payment comprises a micro payment transferred by the buyer.

33. A computer software product for electronic commerce for use by a merchant, the product comprising a computer-readable medium in which program instructions are stored, which instructions, when read by a computer, cause to computer to offer an item for purchase by a buyer on a page per fee basis at a predetermined price via a network link, to provide a plurality of different aliases to represent a network address of the item, all of the plurality of aliases representing the same network address, and to assign a respective alias to each of the plurality of different advertisers, from among a plurality of different aliases, such that each of the plurality of aliases is assigned to specifically identify a respective advertiser among the plurality of advertisers for use by the advertiser in receiving payment for a sale of the item, with defined terms for advertising the item in accordance with which each of the advertisers posts an advertisement for the item, the advertisement containing the alias, which serves as a reference to the network link while concealing the network link from the buyer,

the instructions further causing the computer to convey the item via an advertiser among the plurality of different advertisers to the buyer in response to an order received from the advertiser for supply of the item to the buyer responsive to invocation of the link in the advertisement by the buyer, the order comprising a message including the respective alias of the advertiser, and to receive payment from the buyer for the item, while a predefined portion of the price is paid to the advertiser, responsively to the respective alias, in consideration for posting the advertisement, in accordance with the terms of advertising.

34. A product according to claim 33, wherein the item is offered on a Web page of a Web site maintained by the merchant and accessible via the Internet, and wherein the instructions cause the computer to convey the item to the buyer by granting the buyer access to the Web page.

35. A product according to claim 34, wherein the payment comprises a micro payment transferred by the buyer.